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Cracking Down on the KGB

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LONDON -- Britain's expulsion of 105 Russian diplomats and trade officials is undoubtedly one of the most spectacular counter-espionage sweeps ever made. "Almost unprecedented," a French newspaper called it, "in the relations between states."

Not only in Britain, but in Western Europe generally, the feeling is that this tough action, far from being precipitate, was overdue. The French have openly expressed admiration. Only the German government, worried that the repercussions might hinder its present policy of conciliating the Communists, has seemed nervous.

Britain's action was triggered by the defection, three or four weeks ago, of a senior Soviet spy-master in London. He is said to have been second-in-command of the whole network.

The information with which he bought asylum -- most of which has now been shared with the CIA -- was presumably more detailed and explicit than anything previously available to the counterespionage services. But the extent of Soviet spying in Britain was already well-known.

THE STAFF OF THE Soviet embassy in London was five times larger than that of the British embassy in Moscow. Attempts to limit the number of diplomats were met by an influx of "working wives" -- and by the rapid growth of Soviet trade missions and of Russian state-owned businesses with London offices.

In recent years trade between Britain and Russia has actually declined, but the number of Russian trade officials in Britain has increased, and they are not subject to the travel restrictions imposed on Soviet diplomats. The headquarters of the Soviet Trade Delegation.

At Highgate in north London is a strongly fortified building which enjoys diplomatic immunity. Fifty permanent officials work there, plus 70 who are rotated from Moscow. They are thought to transmit their

Center" -- KGB headquarters at 2 Dzerzhinski Street, Moscow.

Russia has more officials in Britain than in any other Western country, including the United States, far too many for Britain's small counter-espionage department to keep under permanent surveillance.

They treat London as a convenient clearinghouse for information about the Western alliance. They have shown themselves particularly interested in exploring links -- military, political and economic -- between Britain and the United States.

Their principal military targets in Britain seem to be the Underwater Research Establishment at Portland and the radar installations in Yorkshire. But one of the things which have now become evident is the stress they are laying on industrial espionage.

THIS IS OF TWO kinds -- the obtaining of technical secrets and the fomenting of disruption. Agitators in some recent strikes, and probably also in Ireland, have almost certainly been financed by Russian money, channelled through Soviet diplomats and trade officials.

The KGB defector has also revealed the existence of saboteurs "in place," infiltrated into key industrial positions where they simply wait for orders to act.

Even this massive clear-out of Soviet spies barely scratches the surface. The other Communist bloc embassies remain untouched, and it has been estimated by previous defectors that 60 per cent of all Communist officials abroad are actively engaged in some kind of intelligence work.

This huge and sinister traffic continues, year in, year out, irrespective of the Soviet government's public stance. Indeed, the influence of the KGB in the Kremlin seems, if anything, to have grown lately. But, even while sweeping whole battalions of Reds out from under the bed, Britain's Prime Minister, Edward Heath, felt obliged to say that he was only doing it in the interests of better Anglo-Soviet relations. So pervasive, and unrealistic, is the language of de-